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## **Unit 2**

# **Background of Federal Disaster Assistance**



## Check Your Knowledge



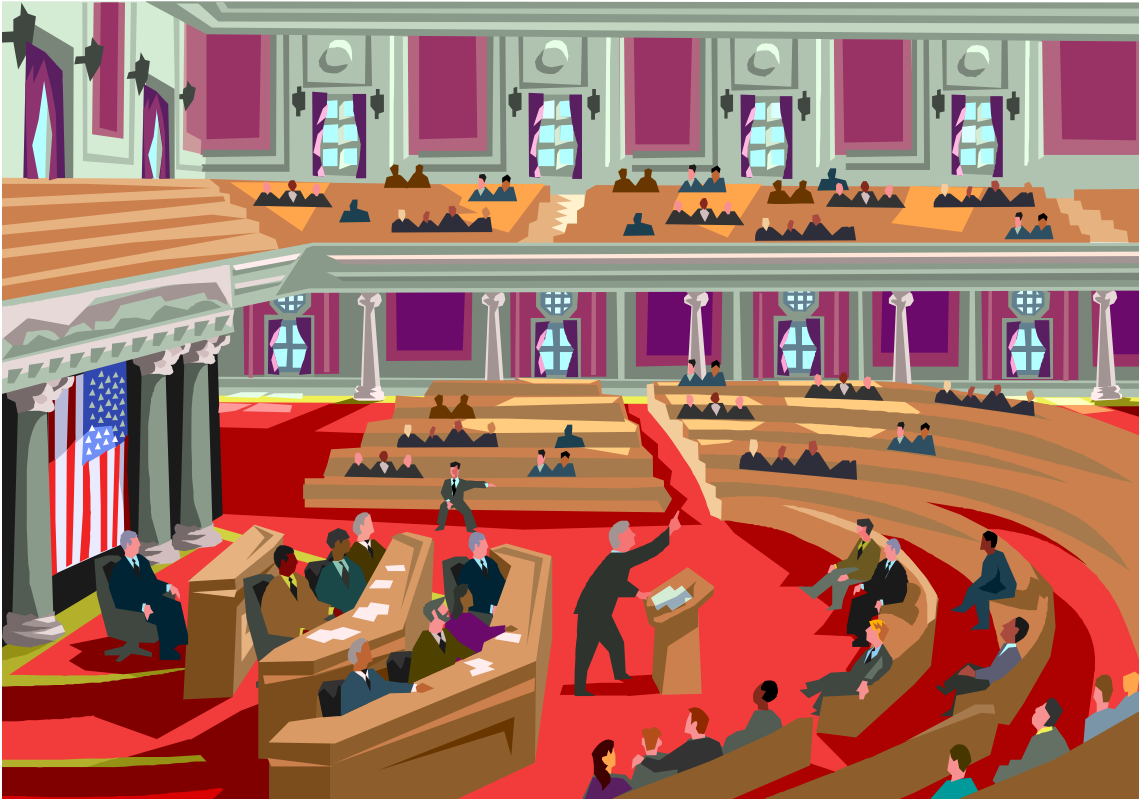
1. The Stafford Act gives FEMA the authority to manage disaster assistance.  
True\_\_\_\_\_ False\_\_\_\_\_
2. What is the minimum Federal/State cost-share formula for Public Assistance?
3. What are three significant dates and events in the development of disaster assistance?
4. List the three disaster assistance programs authorized in the Stafford Act.
5. What is the mission of FEMA?

# Check Your Knowledge

## Answers



1. True.
2. 75%/25%.
3. Significant dates and events:
  - 1950—Federal Disaster Relief Act passed.
  - 1969—Disaster Relief Act of 1969 passed.
  - 1974—Disaster Relief Act of 1974 passed.
  - 1979—FEMA created by President Carter.
  - 1988—Stafford Act passed.
  - 2000—Disaster Mitigation Act passed.
  - 2003—FEMA becomes part of the Department of Homeland Security.
4. Individual Assistance, Public Assistance, Hazard Mitigation.
5. To provide disaster assistance to individuals and communities and to reduce the impact of future events.



# Background of Federal Disaster Assistance

## Overview

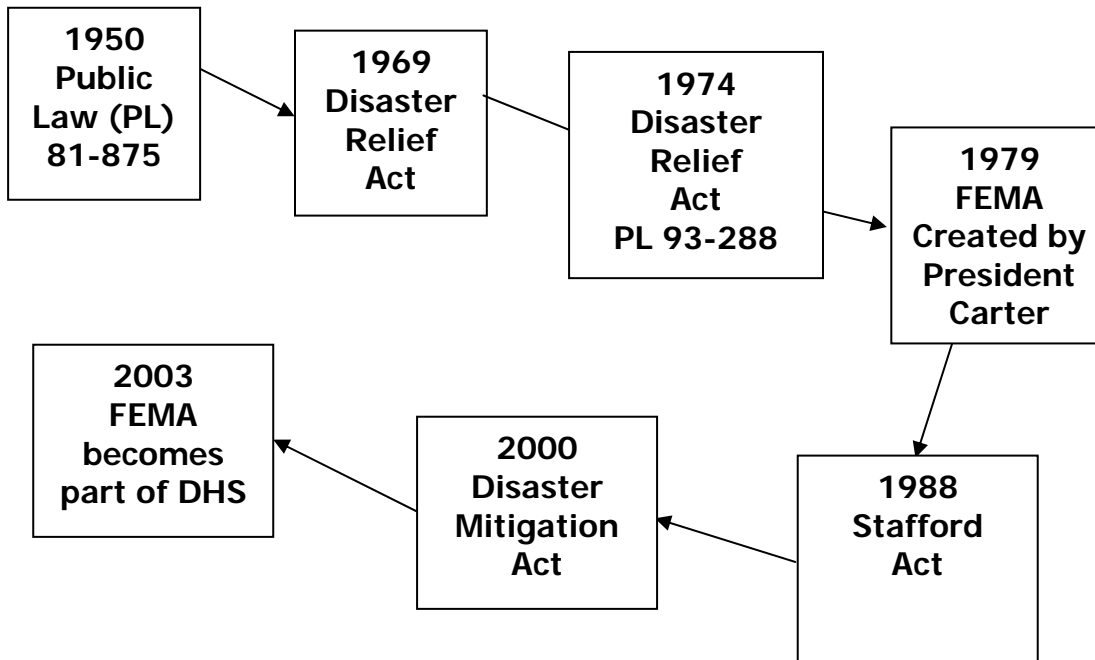
Federal disaster assistance legislation and programs have been evolving since 1950. Through legislation, a variety of disaster relief programs have been established and a wide range of needs addressed. This unit highlights the milestones of Federal disaster assistance development.

Upon completion of this unit, you will be able to:

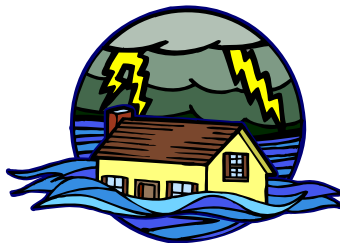
- List three significant dates in the development of disaster assistance programs.
- Describe the function and purpose of the Stafford Act.
- Identify three sources of guidance and policy for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

## Background

Prior to 1950, there was no comprehensive disaster program. Disaster recovery was funded by Congress on an incident-to-incident basis. Starting in 1950 and continuing to the present, disaster relief has been provided for through a series of legislative acts. The following timeline shows the succession:



**Public Law 81-875** was significant for a number of reasons. Funding was authorized for a disaster relief program rather than a single-incident response. The responsibility for determining when Federal disaster relief is required was transferred from Congress to the President. The basic philosophy of Federal disaster relief was developed establishing that Federal assistance is supplemental to State and local resources. The basis for later legislation on cost-sharing between Federal and State or local governments was put into place. Provisions were made for emergency repairs to or temporary replacement of essential public facilities. Aid was provided only to State and local governments.



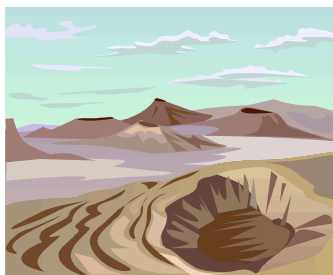
Nearly 20 years later, the **Disaster Relief Act of 1969** was passed. This law introduced the concept of the Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO), and placed the management of Federal disaster relief under one individual who was appointed by the President.

In April 1974, there was a series of devastating tornadoes that hit six Midwestern States. This confirmed the need to add individual and family assistance to the disaster relief program. As a result, the **Disaster Relief Act of 1974 (Public Law 93-288)** was established. Under this law:

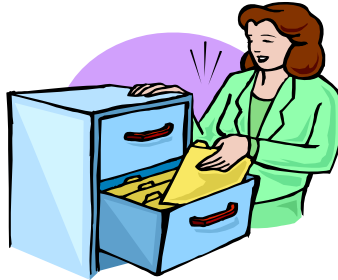
- The Individuals and Households Grant Program is available.
- Federal and State disaster relief operations are conducted on a partnership basis, and a State Coordinating Officer (SCO) works jointly with an FCO.
- Federal assistance supports local, Tribal, and State activities and resources.
- Assistance is contingent upon a Presidential Declaration.

In **1979, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)** was created by executive order of President Carter and was established for the purpose of providing disaster assistance to individuals and communities. FEMA was given the role of coordinating Federal, State, Tribal, and local efforts when a Federal disaster is declared. FEMA was tasked with the mission of reducing loss of life and property, protecting critical infrastructure, and organizing and supporting a comprehensive emergency management plan.

Before 1981, the Public Assistance (PA) Program, which provided disaster assistance to State and local governments, was in the form of a 100-percent Federal grant. The response to the eruption of Mount St. Helens in May 1980 was the first administrative implementation of a 75-percent Federal and 25-percent State and local cost sharing of disaster expenses. This response was the first step toward a cost-sharing, full-partnership concept of managing disaster response and recovery.



During the 1980s, the Senate expressed concern about the use of disaster authority for responding to non-natural disasters or emergencies such as managing the Cuban refugee influx and the Three Mile Island incident. The Three Mile Island incident, as well as a number of perceived deficiencies, stimulated Congress to review disaster programs. Over the next several years, legislation was initiated to change Public Law 93-288.



In November **1988**, the **Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act** was passed. This act provided a framework for continued disaster relief and provided the authority for FEMA's role in managing Federal disaster assistance. It also legislated a minimum 75-percent Federal/25-percent State and local cost sharing for the PA Program. The Stafford Act refocused assistance for non-natural disasters, unless caused by fire, flood, or explosion, to a more limited scope. It also confirmed the importance of individual assistance and added an emphasis on mitigation of future losses.

Key features of the act are:

- State, Tribal, and local governments have the primary responsibility to respond to a disaster.
- Federal assistance is designed to supplement the efforts and available resources of State, Tribal, and local governments, and voluntary relief organizations in alleviating the damage, loss, hardship, or suffering resulting from a disaster.
- FEMA may task any Federal agency, with or without reimbursement, to provide assistance to State, Tribal, and local disaster efforts in a declared disaster.

Disaster assistance programs included in the Stafford Act are:

- Individual Assistance (IA), in the form of individual and household grants and temporary housing.



- PA, including grants for emergency work, repair and restoration, and debris removal.
- Mitigation grants, to reduce long-term risk to life and property from natural or technological disasters.

Congress amended the Stafford Act in October 1993 to expand the scope of mitigation to include acquisition of properties in floodplains. An October 1994 amendment incorporated most of the former Civil Defense Act of 1950, 50 U.S.C. App., into the Stafford Act. This amendment allows FEMA to implement an all-hazards approach to preparedness.

The **Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000** further modified the Stafford Act to establish a national program for pre-disaster mitigation, streamline administration of disaster relief, and control Federal costs of disaster assistance.

In **2003, FEMA became part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)** established by President Bush in 2002. DHS was reorganized on July 12, 2005, with FEMA as a stand-alone agency within the department, responsible for the response and recovery to Incidents of National Significance reporting directly to the DHS Director.

Guidance, standards, policy, and procedures for DHS agencies are set forth in the **National Incident Management System (NIMS)**, the **National Response Plan (NRP)**, and the **Incident Command System (ICS)**.

## Summary

Disaster assistance has been evolving since 1950. Public Law 81-875 was the first legislation to address disaster relief in a broad, ongoing way. Since then, numerous laws and amendments have been passed to ensure systematic disaster assistance. A key piece of this disaster legislation was the Stafford Act which guides all Federal disaster relief and authorizes FEMA to manage Federal disaster assistance. Since its incorporation into DHS, FEMA is guided by the department standards, policies, and procedures set forth in NIMS, the NRP, and ICS.